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A Report

Improving Student Achievement

THE FIFTH AND FINAL REPORT OF THE
EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT COMMISSION
DECEMBER 2000

Education
Improvement
Commission

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

December 2000

Dear Minister,

The Education Improvement Commission is pleased to present its final report, *The Road Ahead - V: A Report on Improving Student Achievement*.

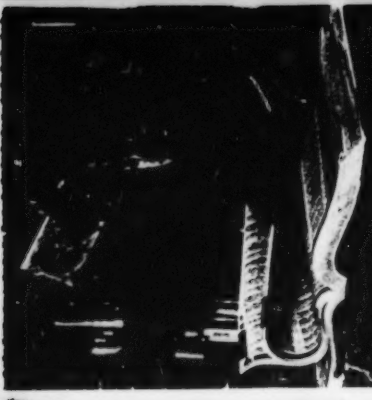
For the past four years, it has been our privilege to oversee the restructuring of Ontario's education system. Over that period we met thousands of people who are dedicated to improving education in our province. This gratifying experience affirmed our belief in our publicly funded education system, and in the crucial role that school boards play in ensuring that our children have access to a high quality education.

We are impressed at the changes our 72 school boards have made in four short years. Change will be a constant feature of our system if it is to continue to improve and serve our students better. To ensure that our students' achievement keeps improving, we believe that four cornerstones must be set in place.

First, we must make sure our children come to school ready to learn. We believe a sizable investment in early childhood education will pay huge dividends in the future.

Second, there should be a focus on professional development and training, so everyone in the education system can meet the needs of our students with the most current knowledge and skills. In addition, we believe it's time to review the qualifications of directors and supervisory officers so we can learn how to develop, attract, and retain bold, visionary leaders.

Third, we need to concentrate on building a positive climate for learning. It's time for a period of stability and for collaborative rather than confrontational approaches to resolving difficult issues. We need to refocus on the essence of our education system: students and their achievement. Through such efforts, we can restore an appreciation for education in our society.

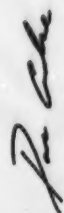


Having reviewed all 72 new district school boards, the Commission is impressed with the way they have dealt with the recent changes. We believe the transparency of school board operations is key to maintaining public confidence in our publicly funded education system. School and board report cards, along with cyclical board reviews, are essential to improving our schools and student achievement.

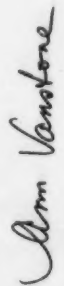
Ann Vanstone
Co-chair

After nearly four years of working with all the partners in Ontario's education community, we believe more strongly than ever in the public education system. School boards play an important role in determining the quality of the education our students receive. The road ahead must lead to improved student achievement, so we must make sure our system continues to have the capacity for change.

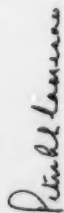
Dave Cooke
Co-chair



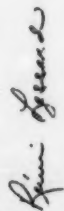
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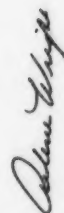
Peter Cameron
Commissioner



R mi Lessard
Commissioner



Betty Moseley-Williams
Commissioner



Arlene Wright
Commissioner

Finally, we need to build and sustain public confidence in our education system: by establishing a comprehensive accountability framework; by ensuring that all school board operations are open and transparent to the public; and by ensuring that our students' achievement continues to improve.

These four cornerstones must be set in place to ensure that our education system continues to serve our students well.

We thank you for giving us the opportunity to be part of the restructuring process. We wish all participants in our education system well as they continue to make changes that will improve our students' achievement.

INTRODUCTION

This report marks the end of the activities of the Education Improvement Commission (EIC). For the past four years it has been our job to oversee the restructuring of Ontario's education system. In that time we've had the privilege of meeting thousands of people who have a stake in our children's education - parents, teachers, principals, support staff, school council representatives, administrators, trustees, and others. Each one of them was passionately dedicated to improving the way we run our publicly funded school system. This gratifying experience has affirmed our belief in public education in Ontario, and in the crucial role that school boards play in giving our children the quality education they are entitled to.

Table 1: The Mandate of the Education Improvement Commission

"The Education Improvement Commission shall oversee the transition to the new system of education governance in Ontario."

Within this general mandate, the Commission was assigned a number of specific tasks, including the following:

- coordinating the initial election, in 1997, of trustees to the new district school boards
- exercising certain controls on school board spending in 1997
- overseeing the transfer of the assets, liabilities, and staff of the former boards to and among the new boards
- conducting research (including consultation with stakeholder groups) and making recommendations to the Minister of Education on policy issues related to education reform.

The past four years have seen one of the largest educational reform agendas in Ontario's history. The aim of these reforms, as we wrote in *The Road Ahead - IV*, has been to improve the "accountability, effectiveness, and quality of Ontario's school system." The changes include the amalgamation of many English-language school boards and the creation of new French-language boards; changes to the elementary and secondary curriculums; the establishment of a four-year secondary school program; legislated changes to the role of principals and in teacher working conditions; a totally overhauled funding formula; and the beginnings, with the establishment of the College of Teachers and the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), of an accountability framework. These major changes have transformed our education system. It now comprises 72 district school boards, of which 31 are English, 29 English Catholic, 4 French, and 8 French Catholic.

The EIC was created in April 1997 with a mandate that is outlined in Table 1. Its legislated role was to ensure that the new district school boards were established in an organized and careful manner. We've viewed our mandate as an exciting opportunity to help boards create successful new beginnings, and have worked with them to find innovative, effective, and efficient ways of doing business.

We have founded our work on 10 principles (see Appendix A), which emphasize our commitment to putting students first in the transition to the new governance system. Many of the newly created school boards used these principles, or developed similar guidelines of their own, to direct their decisions as they found their feet during the transition. Appendix A also lists our work in monitoring the progress and challenges of the restructuring period.

The reforms of recent years presented everyone involved in education with both considerable challenges and enormous opportunities. From the outset, we were determined that changes to the way school boards are run should not affect students' classroom experience. In our *First Interim Report on the Progress Review of Ontario's New District School Boards* (March 1999), we discussed how difficult amalgamations can be and noted, as an analogy, that corporate mergers often fail. We concluded that with our children's education at stake,

the stakes were too high to permit even one of the school board amalgamations to falter.

As the EIC approaches the end of its mandate, the new school boards have made varying progress in their restructuring efforts. Most have made significant strides, and we're confident that none will fail. We give board staff and trustees great credit for the success of the transition, and for the diligence and skill with which they have handled such pivotal changes in administration and governance.

A third partner in the restructuring process, along with district school boards and the EIC, has been the Ministry of Education. The ministry has successfully addressed several challenges that school boards encountered in the wake of amalgamation. We're encouraged, for instance, by the ministry's commitment to support the role of the newly created school councils and the Ontario Parent Council.

Another challenge arose from the introduction, in January 1998, of the ambitious new student-focused funding formula. The new formula distributes operating funds to school boards more equitably, and many boards now receive more money than their predecessor boards were awarded under the former system. Nonetheless, the new arrangement has transformed the way money is allocated to school boards and, not surprisingly, some elements still need

refinement. But while some fine tuning is still required, the ministry is working hard on getting it right. It has, for instance, modified the formula to provide more money in areas such as special education, school buildings, school operations and maintenance, learning opportunity and language grants, and salaries.

We believe the strength of any public education system is built on public confidence. Members of the public need to know that all the partners - the ministry, school boards, administrators, principals, teachers, parents, and the broader community - are working together to see that students are able to reach the highest standard possible. In this regard, we're heartened by what we've seen in Ontario: trustees and senior staff coming together in a spirit of cooperation to forge new school boards; innovative practices that lead to better services and permit more money to be directed to the classroom; parents and school councils emerging as important partners in school and board decision making; teachers adapting to the new curriculum; and principals moving into new leadership roles both in their schools and in their boards. It's clear to us that everyone, from the Ministry of Education to staff and parents, cares about our system and shares a passion to keep making it better.

We were particularly pleased, during our consultations and board reviews, to meet with so many articulate and reflective students. The students we met appreciated the quality of the education they're receiving - and suggested many innovative ways to keep making it better.

Notwithstanding the many accomplishments we've seen in schools across Ontario, we must note that, at the time this report went to print, some unresolved conflicts continued to compromise our students' education. We're extremely concerned about the corrosive climate that persists among the Ministry of Education, the district school boards, and board staff, particularly teachers. This unhealthy atmosphere needs to be dispelled immediately - before our students' education is jeopardized further.

One of the most damaging effects has been the drastic reduction in extracurricular activities in our secondary schools. Our students must have access to an exciting range of after-school activities to enrich their school experience, and we believe it is crucial that extracurricular programs be restored immediately. Research has established that students who participate in extracurricular activities perform better in school. If this situation isn't resolved soon, it will inevitably lead to lower achievement and more dropouts. We can't allow this to happen. We know the issues that have led to this situation are complex.

But we're less concerned with the cause of the problem than with the urgency to find a resolution. The quality of our students' education is being put at risk, and this is unacceptable.

Throughout our series of *Road Ahead* reports, we've used the metaphor of a road map to represent the notion of a common vision of where the education system is headed and what we can expect when we get there. In this, our final report, we'll describe the directions we believe the system must take to ensure that a positive environment for learning continues to evolve, and to ensure that our students' achievements continue to improve. Given the strong public support for our education system, we're confident that our system can keep growing stronger in the years ahead.



BEYOND 2000

FOUR CORNERSTONES OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Ontario's education system has been overhauled in the last few years. The Province has introduced a number of major initiatives to improve our students' quality of education, including:

- curriculum reform
- testing and reporting on student achievement
- funding reform
- the restructuring of school boards, including the amalgamation of many English-language school boards and the creation of French-language boards
- the establishment of teaching as a self-regulated profession, governed by the College of Teachers
- the development of policies on the role of school councils
- the development of legislation to define a new role for principals
- the development of new legislation that clarifies the assignment of instructional time at the secondary level and defines co-instructional activities.

These reforms have required the investment of a lot of hard work and hard cash, and have created a momentum for improvement. We must take care not to lose this impetus because, while much has been accomplished in recent years, much more remains to be done. As the EIC prepares to leave the stage, we believe the most significant question is:

"How can we ensure that our education system will continue to improve?"

In other words, how can we build into the system the ability to assess its own strengths and weaknesses, and to make improvements where and when they are needed? We believe that if we're to enshrine this capacity for continuous improvement, we must first set in place four cornerstones:

1. children who are ready to learn when they come to school
2. professional development, training, and leadership
3. a positive climate for learning
4. an accountability framework.

Our education system cannot continue to improve if the first and most fundamental cornerstone is not in place - namely, *children who come to school ready to learn*. An exemplary curriculum, dedicated and skilled professionals, superb resources, and a supportive climate for learning are not enough if our children are not ready to learn. Therefore, success in promoting early childhood development and learning is an essential component of our capacity to keep building a first-class education system.

It's also crucial that our educators are able to continually update their knowledge, their skills, and their ability to teach and assess student learning. Dynamic, expert leadership is needed to ensure that schools and boards attract and retain highly qualified staff. So *professional development, training, and leadership* is the second cornerstone in the continuous improvement framework.

A third cornerstone is a *collaborative, non-confrontational climate* that allows the system to thrive and students to learn. Over the past 15 years, conflict over numerous issues has made such a climate difficult to maintain. They include the extension to Catholic school boards of the right to offer secondary school programs; conflict between teachers and the government over joint management of the teachers' pension fund; streamlining the Social Contract; recent reforms to secondary education; school board restructuring; the student-focused funding formula; teacher testing; the removal of principals from teacher federations; and legislated teacher workload. Improvement cannot take place in an atmosphere of tension and mistrust. It's time to dispel this atmosphere. All partners need to work together to refocus on the primary purpose of our education system: the continuing achievement of our students.

We believe that a *comprehensive accountability framework* is the fourth cornerstone of a continuously improving education system. Accountability means that information about the education system is widely available: information about what is taught in schools, how well our students are performing, and who is held responsible if things are not working as they should.

To assess how well our education system is performing, we need a shared vision of how the system *should* function. Therefore a strong accountability framework must be built on a clear vision of the goals of education. What students learn, and how their learning is assessed, is a matter of great public interest, so everyone with an interest in our children's education must have a say in developing these goals. Only then will we all be able to understand the vision, and focus on working together to achieve our common objectives.

Only when this final cornerstone is in place can we be sure that the four conditions we've described are working together in harmony, and are enabling the system to continue to improve from within. We'll discuss each of the four cornerstones in more detail in the sections that follow.



CORNERSTONE

READINESS TO LEARN

In 1994, the Royal Commission on Learning identified the advancement of early childhood education as one of four key directions that "can so change the nature of the education enterprise that things will never be the same again."¹ To put it plainly: if we want the education system to keep improving, we need our children to come to school ready to learn. This means we must properly support the learning and development that precedes formal schooling.

It's worth summarizing what a more recent report, the *Early Years Study* (April 1999), has to say about the crucial importance of the early years:

- Early experiences and stimulating, positive interactions with adults and other children are far more important for brain development than previously realized.
- The early years from conception to age six have the most important influence of any time in the life cycle on brain development and subsequent learning, behaviour and health.

- Learning in the early years must be based on quality interactions with caregivers and opportunities for play-based problem solving with other children that stimulates brain development.

- The evidence is clear that good early child development programmes that involve parents or other primary caregivers of young children can vastly improve outcomes for children's behaviour, learning and health in later life.²

The study also points out that an investment in excellent early childhood programs would benefit all children, no matter what their socioeconomic background. It's true that, as a group, children from families with higher incomes tend to show higher achievement - yet a certain percentage of children at *all* points on the socioeconomic scale fail to do as well as they should.

But this has all been said before. Everyone in education, at all levels of government, agrees on the importance of the earliest years in establishing a strong foundation for later success.

There has been some progress in Ontario. The government has established an Early Years Challenge Fund to match, dollar for dollar, private and voluntary-sector contributions to support community-based early child development and parenting programs. It has also provided funding for several demonstration projects across the province to foster different approaches to early childhood development and parenting at the community level.

But as yet, despite some investment, some progress, and much talk, we have no firm commitment - either provincially or federally - to a systematic framework to improve our children's early years. We still do not guarantee all preschool children access to affordable, quality child-care programs and the highest standards of nutrition, health care, and safety. Nor do we ensure that accessible and affordable parenting programs are available in all of our communities. We've talked and studied enough. Now it's time for bold action on this front.

So how should we move forward with a focused children's agenda that is aimed at improving the earliest years of our children's lives? We believe the

Ministry of Education should monitor elementary students' levels of achievement, and then set targets to improve performance. One monitoring mechanism already in operation is the assessment of Grade 3 students by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO).

It's widely considered that systematic assessment at this stage serves as an early warning of individual students' difficulties, and allows our schools to respond by focusing on areas that need improvement. We agree - and we believe that, with skilled help from their teachers, students can improve their achievement after Grade 3. But there's another, complementary, way to look at Grade 3 results: they can also tell us how well we've been supporting our children's development *prior* to the assessment.

For example, the recent EQAO results show that 51% of Ontario's Grade 3 students perform below the provincially expected standard in reading, 58% perform below the standard in writing, and 43% underperform in mathematics. We believe that now these students have been identified, their teachers will be able to take measures to help them do better. But we also maintain - and anyone concerned with our students' development would agree - that these levels of achievement are unacceptable and that we must act to ensure that we see an improvement in future EQAO Grade 3 results. We believe that a step in the right direction is the commit-

ment made in the government's 2000 budget to spend \$70 million a year on improving the reading skills of students from junior kindergarten to Grade 3. We are especially pleased that the Ministry of Education plans to establish a target for the percentage of students who will perform at or above the provincially expected levels in language and mathematics. One possible target would be to increase the performance of all Grade 3 students, so that 75% of them achieve the expected standard by 2005-06.

But achieving this goal will require the provincial government, along with other public and private sector partners, to take steps to improve children's readiness to learn when they begin school. It will require the Ministry of Education to focus attention and resources on the earliest years of schooling, and on systematically improving young children's nutrition, health, safety, and development. We believe that a key plank in this strategy should be a plan to phase in support and funding for full-time junior and senior kindergarten over a five- to seven-year period. (At present, the government funds only half-time kindergarten.)

Such a plan should ensure that:

- appropriate programs are developed to meet the needs of our young children
- there is an adequate supply of qualified staff to offer the programs

- there is enough accommodation for the expanded programs, and regional differences are addressed by, for example, offering programs in a variety of settings, such as "kindergarten houses" established in non-school sites to reduce transportation costs in rural communities

- services from other agencies are coordinated to serve the needs of our young children.

It is interesting to note that when junior kindergarten programs were first introduced about 30 years ago, it was through a similar phase-in process.

If the ministry funds full-time kindergarten, school boards should be required to provide parents with this option, which would give them affordable access to high-quality, developmentally based early childhood education.

We understand that this strategy cannot be accomplished overnight. Yet the time seems right for such a bold move. These are good economic times, and governments are looking to invest in programs that will keep building our collective prosperity.

Such an investment would pay rich dividends in the future: our students' performance would improve throughout their years in school, and the cost of remedial programs - including those in the justice system - would drop.

Many boards have surplus space that could be used for expanded kindergarten programs. At the same time, we're about to phase out Grade 13. What better place to invest the savings that will result than in programs that develop our youngest children?

Surely, with all we know about the importance of the early years, this is the time for a major investment in our young children's development. We owe them no less. If we don't do it now, when will we ever do it?

Recommendation 1

That the Provincial government strengthen its commitment to Ontario's children, by ensuring their access to affordable, high-quality child care programs and excellent standards of nutrition, health care, and safety.

Recommendation 2

That the Provincial government ensure that accessible and affordable parenting programs are available in all communities.

Recommendation 3

That the Ministry of Education set a clear and challenging target for improving Grade 3 reading, writing, and mathematics results by the 2005-06 school year.

Recommendation 4

That the Ministry of Education plan to phase in support and funding for full-time junior and senior kindergarten over a five-to seven-year period, and that the plan ensure that:

- *appropriate programs are developed to meet the needs of our young children*
- *there is an adequate supply of qualified staff to offer the programs*
- *there is enough accommodation for the expanded programs, and regional differences are addressed by, for example, offering programs in a variety of settings, such as "kindergartens" established in non-school sites to reduce transportation costs in rural communities*
- *services from other agencies are coordinated to serve the needs of our young children.*

CORNERSTONE 2100

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, TRAINING, AND LEADERSHIP

Professional development and training, along with quality leadership, are essential components of a continuously improving education system. Our schools can only be as good as the teachers who work in them and the school board staff who provide support. Excellent leaders are needed to establish and monitor high expectations, and to ensure that the board has the ability and the resources to meet them.

Professional Development and Training

Research shows that teachers' expertise is a major factor in students' achievement. Changes in educational policy will count for little if teachers lack the knowledge and skills to implement them. The same principle applies to support and administrative staff.

The first step in ensuring we have a pool of dedicated, expert teachers is recruitment. If our schools are to remain strong, we must continue to attract highly qualified teachers, and teaching must be held in high regard and viewed as a respected and desirable profession.

In our *Third Interim Report* (January 2000), we expressed concern at an evident shortage of qualified teachers, principals, and other professional staff in Ontario's schools. Our second round of reviews supports our observation, particularly in smaller northern boards, and so we believe the Ministry of Education, in consultation with the College of Teachers, should move quickly to increase the number of teachers entering the profession. The ministry has begun to address this problem - for example, by funding more spaces in faculties of education - but it needs to go further. The College must also keep pre-service teacher training up to date, so that teachers begin their careers with the skills they need to teach the current curriculum.

But no one starts a profession with all the knowledge and skills they'll need to sustain them through their career. So, equally, we must continue to support professional development. If the education system is to keep improving, teachers must be able to keep building their knowledge and skills. And job requirements change over time, which means that classroom staff must also be given the chance to master new skills. In fact, all members of the education

community - including ministry staff, trustees, board administrators, principals, school secretaries, education assistants, custodians, and school council representatives - can benefit from professional development and training.

What types of professional development are most likely to lead to improvements in the classroom? Programs that are comprehensive and that focus on the common goal of improving our students' achievement. Fragmented, uncoordinated programs are much less effective. Responsibility for upgrading is shared among the individual employee, the Ministry of Education, district school boards and schools, and federations and unions. All these partners are already demonstrating commitment to professional development. For example, the ministry has mandated that teachers take an exam at the end of their pre-service training, and participate in ongoing professional development to keep their certification current. Nevertheless, we encourage them to work together to make sure professional development is always relevant to our overall goals.

Effective professional development must also be timely. When the Ministry of Education introduces new curriculum and policies, it should take care to allow enough time for employees to receive necessary professional development. Educational reforms simply won't work if staff are not ready to implement them - so timely upgrading of knowledge and skills must become part of our culture of continuous improvement.

The Ministry of Education has developed a forum whose role is to discuss and coordinate issues affecting the delivery of educational programs. The forum includes the EQAO, the College of Teachers, faculties of education, school board associations, parent and other advocacy groups, and the ministry. We believe these discussions should continue. In particular, the ministry should coordinate training and professional development on new initiatives with the College of Teachers so everyone in the system is properly prepared to make sure the initiatives are a success.

The Ministry of Education, in conjunction with various partners, is funding many initiatives to support the new curriculum. They include summer institutes, train-the-trainer sessions, and training manuals for teachers; professional development for directors and supervisory officers; and programs to help principals adapt to their new role. Also, the training the EQAO gives to teachers who mark province-wide tests benefits their students when they

return to the classroom. The Ministry is also moving forward with a teacher testing program to ensure that all teachers continue to have up-to-date qualifications. In addition, we estimate that in the 1999-2000 school year, Ontario's school boards received about \$41 million for professional development through the student-focused funding formula.

While this is impressive, is it enough? How can we arrive at an appropriate figure for investment in professional development and training?

The Conference Board of Canada indicated in its 1999 report³ that the average spending for professional development and training, across all sectors, was \$776 per employee, or 1.6% of payroll. The technology/communications sector spent \$1,170 per employee, while the health/education sector spent only \$423. In the United States, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future recommends that "states allocate at least 1% of state and local funding to be consistently devoted to high-quality professional development. States should also provide matching funds for districts to increase their investments in professional development to 3% of total expenditures."⁴

The total education payroll in Ontario is about \$10.6 billion. Devoting between 1% and 3% of this amount to train and develop teachers and others would yield between \$106 million and \$318 million per year. The national

average of 1.6% of payroll would produce about \$170 million per year for professional development in Ontario.

We believe that now is the time for a major investment in professional development and training at all levels of our education system. It should cover a wide range of topics - leadership development, accountability, curriculum training, school and board improvement planning skills, assessment skills, communications, and training for support staff. And it should be coordinated among all education partners in a continuing spirit of cooperation.

The Importance of Leadership

In the last 20 years, both the private and public sectors have been marked by restructuring, with increasing emphasis being placed on the importance of leadership. According to leadership guru Stephen Covey,

"Effective leadership is the only competitive advantage that will endure. That's because leadership has two sides - what a person is (character) and what a person does (competence)."⁵ Leaders are key in setting the climate and direction of our school boards, so it's critical that we're able to attract and retain outstanding leaders. We need to know what kinds of people we want to lead our school boards, and what strategies we should set in place to attract them. Trustees must hold their director accountable for implementing

board policies and, ultimately, for the achievement of the board's students. This is no small responsibility, so they should understand that appointing the director is one of the most significant decisions they'll make during their tenure.

Given the importance of leadership, and the increasingly complex role of directors and supervisory officers, we believe it's time to review the qualities that the leaders of our school boards should possess.

Today's school boards are large, complex organizations. Their collective mandate is to educate over 2 million students. Directors of education are ultimately responsible for the quality of this education. Research has identified other responsibilities for directors: to develop a collective vision for their boards; to manage their highly complex organizations; to work with an elected board of trustees; to develop and manage innovation and creativity; to communicate effectively with parents, community members, staff, and trustees; to build consensus and manage conflict; to develop management models to monitor, evaluate, and improve the performance of staff; and to lead within a unionized environment.

Are these indeed the skills that directors and other senior educational leaders need? If so, how are these skills developed? How do we identify individuals who possess these skills? Are they the only skills that directors need? And what about directors'

qualifications? In Ontario, the *Education Act* requires that a director of education be certified as a supervisory officer, which means that he or she must hold a valid teaching certificate and meet certain other criteria. Across Canada, however, the qualifications for directors vary quite broadly (see Appendix B).

In the light of recent changes that affect other individuals in the education system - such as the new role of principals and the move towards teacher testing - it seems timely to also review the characteristics, skills, qualifications, and experience required of our school board leaders. Directors and supervisory officers need to be more than good administrators; they must also be innovative leaders with vision who can direct change. We believe the ministry should review supervisory officer qualifications to see if we're meeting our leadership needs for the 21st century. The review should focus on the question, "How can we develop, attract, and retain bold, visionary leaders for our school system?" It should also ask:

- What academic and professional qualifications should supervisory officers and directors have?
- What experience and qualities should they have?
- Should supervisory officers be required to be accredited on a periodic basis?
- Should we establish a mentorship process for newly appointed senior educational leaders?

We believe the Ministry of Education should consult all partners in our education system to determine the qualities required in senior educational leaders. It should then determine the factors necessary to develop, attract, and retain these leaders, and put its findings into practice.

Recommendation 5

That the Ministry of Education:

- ensure that enough qualified teachers are entering the education system
- consult with all partners in the education system to assess their needs for professional development and training
- coordinate essential professional development so that adequate, cost-effective upgrading is available to everyone who needs it, when they need it
- increase funding for professional development to support continuing improvement in student achievement

Recommendation 6

That the Ministry of Education review the leadership requirements for directors and supervisory officers to ensure quality leadership for our education system.

CORNERSTONE

A POSITIVE CLIMATE FOR LEARNING

Public education can only flourish if the public has confidence in the system and teachers are committed and enthusiastic. Without such a stable, positive climate, our students will not be able to focus properly on learning, and improvement of the system will stall.

We need to return to such a climate in Ontario. Over the past few years, the whole education system has undergone upheaval, which has meant a lot of work and stress for all concerned. The restructuring of school boards' governance, administration, and business functions - the area of change that has fallen within the EIC's mandate - has been largely successful. But in the classroom - where the most important business of our education system takes place - the last few years have included periods of disruption, tension, and bad feelings.

It's time to refocus on the essence of our education system: students and their achievement. For many students, particularly at the secondary level, the past few years have been a challenging time to be attending school. Their classes have been disrupted, after-hours help with school work has in many cases been withdrawn, and extracurricular activities have been drastically reduced.

In our board reviews, we spoke to many students throughout the province. They believe that the ongoing tensions among the Ministry of Education, the school boards, and their teachers have affected their education, and are concerned for themselves and for the students who will follow them. Many told us, with frustration, that every year of their secondary school career has been disrupted by labour disputes.

We cannot overstate our concern about the reduction in extracurricular activities. School should be more than attending classes. Research shows that students who take part in extracurricular activities enjoy greater overall success in school, and students who participate in after-school programs have lower dropout rates. If the current impasse continues, it's clear that more students will drop out and fewer will succeed. This is not acceptable.

Obviously, there will always be differences of opinion among teachers, school boards, and the ministry. What is important is how we approach these differences. Students learn values, as well as strategies for problem solving, by observing the situations that affect their lives; for too long, our students have been surrounded by negative, confrontational approaches to conflict. Equally, the months and years of acrimony will inevitably erode the public's confidence in their education system.

The issues on the table among teachers, boards, and the Ministry of Education are complex, and it's natural that feelings are strong. Yet difficult issues are rarely resolved through a showdown. Regardless of how the current deadlock developed, all the parties are responsible for settling it in a collaborative manner. We recognize that this will require compromise on all sides. But for the good of our students and everyone involved in education, we urge the Ministry of Education to immediately renew dialogue with teachers' federations, and consult with all education partners as appropriate, with a view to the immediate reinstatement of extracurricular activities.

We also need to restore an appreciation for education in our society. In September, the Royal Bank of Canada wrote in an open letter entitled "The Importance of Teaching".⁶

We are all in favour of education, but we tend to take for granted the people who provide it. If our society cares about the future, it will resume giving teachers the support and credit they deserve....

The letter concludes:

"Teaching is not a lost art, but the regard for it lost tradition," Jacques Barzun wrote. If this society knows what is good for it, that regard will be restored. Parents and other concerned citizens will do all they can to make a teacher's life less troublesome and give due credit to the profession. To a large extent, teachers are in charge of the future. The fate of people depends on how well they are taught today.

It's interesting to note that this letter was first published in 1989, and was republished this year because of the perceived significance of its message. It's time to take this message to heart, and to promote the value of education and our teachers.

Recommendation 7

That the Minister of Education set in motion an appropriate strategy to resolve current labour unrest, and that:

- a) all parties approach the process in a spirit of cooperation and compromise, and
- b) teachers' federations return to offering a full range of extracurricular activities during this process.

CORNERSTONE

AN ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

The final cornerstone of a continually improving education system is public support and confidence. The public needs to know what we're doing, believe in what we're doing, understand how well we're doing, and support our efforts to keep improving.

We can only attain this level of public engagement by making sure the system is accountable. Accountability to the public promotes open dialogue about the objectives of education and makes it easier for necessary changes to happen. In *The Road Ahead - IV*, we described in detail what an accountability framework for Ontario's education system should look like, and how it should be set in place.

The foremost goal of holding the education system accountable is to ensure that our students get the education they are entitled to. Earlier in this report, we discussed the importance of supporting children in their early years. The various partners in education also need to ask, "How well are we serving students throughout their years in school?" If school boards are obliged by an accountability mechanism to collect and publish student performance results, this question will be easier to answer.

For example, such a program would help the Ministry of Education to gauge the success of Ontario's new secondary school curriculum. Is the curriculum serving all students well? When curriculum is reformed, it's important to closely monitor the impact of the changes on students. We should set high expectations and challenge our students to meet them - but should also pay attention to performance levels across the province to ensure that all students are able to achieve the goals of the curriculum and that at-risk students have appropriate support. We're concerned that some students are slipping through the cracks. If this is the case, the ministry may need to make adjustments to the curriculum.

So we need data - like the credit accumulation of Grade 9 students, the results of Grade 10 literacy tests, destinations after secondary school, and dropout rates - to help us see whether the new curriculum is appropriate for all students. If it isn't, we need to make changes as soon as possible; if we don't respond promptly, many students will not get the education they need and their futures will be in jeopardy. A well-developed accountability framework would provide this kind of data, and would help us to make timely adjust-

ments to the curriculum and funding to improve our students' success. Only through an accountability framework can we be sure, first, of identifying struggling students early enough to help them individually and, second, of diagnosing ways in which the system itself needs to change to serve them better.

In addition, student performance information can help us assess financial accountability. In other words: Is enough money available to allow students to reach the required standards? Is the available money being spent appropriately?

In preparing this report, we reviewed accountability mechanisms established by other jurisdictions in Canada and elsewhere. Most use well-defined, comparable data to measure student, school, and board performance. Many supplement their data with school and board reviews. Each jurisdiction we studied believes that greater accountability leads to continuous improvement and better student performance.

In Ontario, we already have two powerful tools for accountability in place: the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) and the College of Teachers. In addition, the Ministry of Education is planning to introduce the Ontario Education Number so that students' performance can be tracked over time. But to make its accountability strategy truly comprehensive, the ministry needs to:

- legislate an accountability framework to support continuous improvement in the education system
- define the standards by which the performance of schools and school boards should be assessed
- require schools and boards to develop and publish report cards
- collect, analyse, and assess student data on a school-by-school and board-by-board basis
- require schools and boards to establish improvement plans that can be monitored
- establish an independent agency to conduct ongoing board reviews that focus on the question, "How successful is this school board in promoting a high level of student achievement?"

- let the public know how well their schools and boards are performing
- establish a code of accounts that allows the public, boards, employee groups, and the ministry to compare the way boards are spending their allocated funds, and to evaluate whether provincial funding is enough to meet the goals of the curriculum.

Such a comprehensive accountability framework will give all the partners in education the information they need to ensure that our students' achievement continues to improve.

Recommendation 8

That the Ministry of Education act immediately on our recommendations in The Road Ahead – IV concerning the introduction of a comprehensive accountability framework.

SUMMARY

THE ROAD AHEAD

On December 31, 2000, the EIC's mandate will end. Over the past four years, we've seen significant strides in the way Ontario's education system works. But we believe there is still work to be done to ensure that student achievement keeps improving. This report summarizes what we think is needed.

Four cornerstones must be set in place to ensure that our system can continue to build on its strong foundation. First, we need to ensure that our children are prepared to begin their formal education as eager learners. A bold investment in early childhood education will pay huge dividends in the future. There will be less need for remedial programs, because more children will be ready to learn the first time around.

Second, we must focus on professional development and training, and review the characteristics and qualifications we want to see in the leaders of our education system. To ensure the quality of education we want for our children, we must support career-long, relevant professional development so that everyone working in the education system has the most current knowledge and skills. We also believe it is time to review the qualifications of directors and supervisory officers to learn how we can develop, attract, and retain

bold, visionary leaders for our school system. Our educational leaders need to be more than good administrators; they must also be innovative leaders with vision who can direct change.

Third, we need a period of stability in our education system to consolidate the gains we've made. The past few years have been a period of rapid, profound change. Along with the successes, there have been bitter struggles. It's time for everyone to back off from confrontation and to refocus on making our educational program the best that it can be.

Finally, we should strive to build and sustain public confidence in Ontario's education system: by establishing a comprehensive accountability framework; by communicating openly with each partner in the education system; and by ensuring that our students' achievement continues to improve.

We believe these four cornerstones form the basis of our education system's capacity to develop and improve. The Ministry of Education and its partners must provide strong leadership to ensure that the cornerstones are securely cemented in place. Our children's future depends on it.

We thank the Minister of Education for providing us with the opportunity to be part of the restructuring process. To the district school boards, their employees and students, and the parents and community members with whom we met, we extend our appreciation for your openness and the generosity with which you shared your time and your ideas. Your participation and contribution has been gratifying. Good luck as you continue to develop Ontario's education system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations contained in this report are listed again below.

Recommendation 1: That the Provincial government strengthen its commitment to Ontario's children, by ensuring their access to affordable, high-quality child care programs and excellent standards of nutrition, health care, and safety.

Recommendation 2: That the Provincial government ensure that accessible and affordable parenting programs are available in all communities.

Recommendation 3: That the Ministry of Education set a clear and challenging target for improving Grade 3 reading, writing, and mathematics results by the 2005-06 school year.

Recommendation 4: That the Ministry of Education plan to phase in support and funding for full-time junior and senior kindergarten over a five- to seven- year period, and that the plan ensure that:

- appropriate programs are developed to meet the needs of our young children
- there is an adequate supply of qualified staff to offer the programs

- there is enough accommodation for the expanded programs, and regional differences are addressed by, for example, offering programs in a variety of settings, such as "kindergartens" established in non-school sites to reduce transportation costs in rural communities
- services from other agencies are coordinated to serve the needs of our young children.

Recommendation 5: That the Ministry of Education:

- ensure that enough qualified teachers are entering the education system
- consult with all partners in the education system to assess their needs for professional development and training
- coordinate essential professional development so that adequate, cost-effective upgrading is available to everyone who needs it, when they need it
- increase funding for professional development to support continuing improvement in student achievement.

Recommendation 6: That the Ministry of Education review the leadership requirements for directors and supervisory officers to ensure quality leadership for our education system.

Recommendation 7: That the Minister of Education set in motion an appropriate strategy to resolve current labour unrest, and that:

- a) all parties approach the process in a spirit of cooperation and compromise, and
- b) teachers' federations return to offering a full range of extracurricular activities during this process.

Recommendation 8: That the Ministry of Education act immediately on our recommendations in *The Road Ahead - IV* concerning the introduction of a comprehensive accountability framework.

APPENDIX A

THE EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT COMMISSION, 1997-2000

The Commission's Guiding Principles

On August 21, 1998, the EIC established the following principles to guide its work.

The Commission will:

- put students first
- seek equality of educational opportunity for students
- implement reform with care and sensitivity
- respect the rights of individuals and community as defined by the Constitution of Canada and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
- look at the whole school community, not just dollars and cents
- value the commitment and contributions of all who work in Ontario's education system
- focus available resources on the student and teachers in the classroom

- promote the effective and efficient use of resources
- understand that, in a province as large and diverse as Ontario, local communities must be encouraged to innovate and make decisions
- welcome and seek ideas from the education community and the public.

Planning for the Transition

In preparing for the transition to the new district school boards, the EIC:

- established transitional controls
- facilitated the work of Local Education Improvement Committees (LEICs)
 - funding
 - LEIC conference
 - attendance at LEIC meetings to provide guidance
- Released directives to govern the transfer of staff, assets, and liabilities to the new district school boards
- Released the *School Board Transition Handbook*

- Appointed facilitators to assist in the transfer of employees, assets, and liabilities to the 12 new French-language boards
- Coordinated trustee elections (November 1997) and adjudicated in 34 appeals related to trustee distribution
- Reviewed and made recommendations to the Ministry of Education regarding the distribution of:
 - transition funding (\$750,000)
 - school board restructuring funds (\$384,343,720)

Transition to the New District School Boards (January 1, 1998)

The EIC oversaw:

- the creation of 72 new district school boards within four systems:
 - English-language
 - English-language Catholic
 - French-language
 - French-language Catholic

- the transfer of over 6,000 staff by August 31, 1998
- the transfer of about \$1 billion in assets and liabilities
- the process developed to resolve disputes related to the distribution of assets and liabilities and the transfer of employees
- creation of the Education Sector Adjustment Advisory Committee
- the development of an electronic employment register

Research, Progress Review of Ontario's New District School Boards, and Other Activities

The EIC initially published three reports (and eventually published a total of five) in the *Road Ahead* series:

- *The Road Ahead: A Report on Learning Time, Class Size and Staffing* (September 1997)
- *The Road Ahead - II: A Report on the Role of School Boards and Trustees* (December 1997)
- *The Road Ahead - III: A Report on the Role of School Councils* (November 1998)

We conducted a progress review of Ontario's new district school boards, and published:

- 72 individual board reports
- *First Interim Report on the Progress Review of Ontario's New District School Boards* (March 1999)
- *Second Interim Report on the Progress Review of Ontario's New District School Boards* (September 1999)
- *Third Interim Report on the Progress Review of Ontario's New District School Boards* (January 2000)
- *The Road Ahead - IV: A Report on Improving Schools Through Greater Accountability* (April 2000)
- *Best of Effective Practices* (April 2000)

We also published:

- "School Boards and Not-for-Profit Organizations": A Letter to Janet Ecker, Minister of Education (October 2000)
- *Collaboration Among School Boards: Working Together for Better Value* (October 2000)

- *School Improvement Planning: A Handbook for Principals, Teachers, and School Councils* (November 2000)

- *Educating Together: A Handbook for Trustees, School Boards, and Communities* (Fall 2000)

Conferences, Presentations, and Pilot Projects

The EIC presented the following:

- "Shifting the Balance: Shared Decision Making in School Boards" (conference)
- Trustee training workshops
- *Best of Effective Practices* presentations
- School improvement planning pilot project

APPENDIX B

MINIMUM REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS FOR DIRECTORS OF EDUCATION ACROSS CANADA

Minimum Mandatory Requirements for Directors of Education

Jurisdiction	Requirements	Additional Comments	Source
British Columbia	Teaching certificate and experience	Unspoken qualifications - at least a master's degree. The Association has established "Dimensions of Practice" that it expects superintendents to follow. This is a professional growth model. BCSSA is reviewing qualifications in discussion with universities, the BCCT, and other related groups.	Joan Collins, Executive Director, British Columbia School Superintendents' Association Schools Act, section 19 (specifies only a teaching certificate - does not specify how many years of experience)
Alberta	- Bachelor of Education - Master's degree - Teaching certificate 3 years experience in a school system	Regulation expires May 31, 2003 - will be reviewed at that time	Superintendent of Schools Regulation A.R. 2/99

Jurisdiction	Requirements	Additional Comments	Source
Saskatchewan	• "Professional A" teaching certificate (in Education Act) • Two years' administrative experience (in Education Act) • One year of graduate work • Minimum two years' teaching experience in K-12 • Evidence of good character • Position must be designated by Education Relations Board as out-of-scope • Member of League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents (LEADS)	LEADS is a professional body - has code of ethics and the right to discipline its members LEADS members are not members of Saskatchewan Teachers Federation "Evidence of good character" requirement is generally satisfied by a character reference or letter of reference from a colleague or supervisor	Education Act has minimum requirements for director; also refers to LEADS Act LEADS Act, section 17, states that LEADS can make by laws prescribing requirements for positions
Manitoba	• None that are codified in legislation or regulations	Many school divisions expect at least a master's degree Public School Act states that a board <i>shall</i> appoint a secretary-treasurer, but <i>may</i> appoint a superintendent	Arnold Reimer, Executive Director, Manitoba Association of School Superintendents
Ontario	• Qualified as a teacher (Education Act, section 283 (1)) • Ontario College of Teachers certifies that person meets the qualifications of a supervisory officer (Regulation 309, section 2)	Education Act, section 279, states that every board shall employ a supervisory officer as director of education Section 278 states that every supervisory officer shall hold the qualifications required under the regulations for a supervisory officer Section 283 (1) states that a board shall not appoint or employ a person as a director of education unless the person is a supervisory officer who qualified as such as a teacher	Education Act, R.S.O. 1990 as amended. Regulation 309 - Supervisory Officers

Jurisdiction	Requirements	Additional Comments	Source
Quebec	- Graduate or undergraduate degree in a relevant field of study, or hold a senior executive or senior staff position (excluding manager) 10 years' relevant experience with at least 5 years in a senior staff position	Senior staff positions (excluding manager) require a permanent teaching licence Regulation spells out complete working conditions including salary, severance, vacation, etc.	<i>Règlement sur les conditions d'emploi des gestionnaires des commissions scolaires</i> (revised May 9, 2000)
New Brunswick	- Teaching certificate - Five years' experience		Regulation 97-150 (School Administration)
Nova Scotia	Currently being modified and therefore unavailable at this time		Chuck Goren, Assistant Registrar, Policy Branch, Department of Education
Newfoundland	- Teaching certificate - Master's degree 5 years' administrative experience		Regulation under the Schools Act
Prince Edward Island	None that are required by legislation or regulation		Department of Education

Endnotes

1. Royal Commission on Learning, *For the Love of Learning, A Short Version* (Toronto, Queen's Printer, 1994), 10.
2. Ontario Children's Secretariat, *Early Years Study* (Toronto, the Secretariat, 1999), 6-7.
3. Conference Board of Canada, *Training & Development Outlook 1999* (Ottawa, the Board, 1999).
4. Cited in Linda Darling-Hammond, *Investing in Quality Teaching: State-Level Strategies* (Denver, Education Commission of the States, 2000).
5. Cited in *Leadership Quotes*, www.rwu.ca/leadership/leadershi2.htm (Langley, B.C., Trinity Western University, 24 November 2000).
6. Royal Bank of Canada, "The Importance of Teaching," (Toronto, Royal Bank, 2000).